



Fact Sheet: Feminist Grantmaking for Equitable Futures

Dec. 1, 2020

Foundations across Canada grant millions of dollars to organizations addressing social issues such as poverty, education, the environment, health and more every year. These pressing issues intersect with many identities such as race, gender, sexual orientation, class, immigration or Indigenous status.

Across the various issues and identities, women, girls, Two-Spirit people and gender-diverse people have faced historical and continual disadvantages and discrimination. Grantmakers who are looking to increase their impact must consider the role that gender, privilege and power have in the context of the issues being addressed in order to create a more fair and equitable society.

“Feminist grantmaking has the power, with intention, to grant funds to organizations and groups at the margins and [who are often] invisible”. Mai Ngo, Gender, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Specialist — [“Webinar: Feminist Grantmaking,” 2020](#)

Why is it important for grantmakers?

Now more than ever, there are increasing calls to action for diversity, equity and inclusion in all sectors, including foundations. The inequalities that surfaced during the COVID-19 pandemic, Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls to action and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls are all clear signs that there is work to do.



“What we mean by a Feminist Future: ‘A vision of a world where all women, girls, Two-Spirit and gender-diverse people have equal access to justice, opportunities, resources and decision-making. One where people have body autonomy and self-determination and can live a life free from violence. A global community that benefits when those most impacted by oppression are lifted up. A decolonized future, a future where power is shared and where identity does not dictate life outcomes. We have a vision of the future where all identities are celebrated and a source of joy and solidarity’”
— ***“[#VitalSigns2020](#),” 2020***

Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls is the fifth of the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030. Yet, according to the 2020 World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report, gender parity may not be attained for another 99.5 years. “Overcoming gender inequality will not result from specific isolated programs, but from a comprehensive approach that involves multiple sectors and stakeholders” (“[Gender-Lens Philanthropy](#),” 2019).

More and more foundations are taking feminist approaches to grantmaking and working to shift power to those who best know the needs of communities, as well as in ensuring diverse voices are at the table where important decisions about the future are being made. Today, funders have a greater responsibility to reassess and implement their grantmaking practices that promote equity and inclusion.

In 2019, Community Foundations of Canada became part of a coalition of partners in creating the Equality Fund through a multi-year collaboration to advance gender equality. Having taken important learning from the Pilot Fund for Gender Equality earlier in 2020, a national initiative known as the Communities for Gender Equality was launched for participating community foundations to spend 18-months on a journey towards gender-lens institutional change, grantmaking, and investments. The goal is to build on efforts to shift power to women, girls, Two-Spirit and gender-diverse people and will work towards a future grounded in justice and gender equality.

“Each issue we care about and want to impact has a gendered aspect, whether we are aware of it or not. Applying a gender lens, particularly one that takes into consideration the many interwoven



aspects of equity including race, immigrant and Indigenous status, can improve our grantmaking. — “[Gender-Lens Philanthropy](#),” 2019

Questions to ask your foundation:

- How can we be more flexible when it comes to funding feminist work and organizations?
- How do we ensure we are listening to what people are really saying in order to make better decisions and create a culture of diversity, equity and inclusion?
- How do we ensure we are tracking and reporting these initiatives to demonstrate the needs of women, girls and non-binary people are met?

Achieving gender equality in our communities requires the recognition that every policy, program and project affects men and women differently. And "equality" means that one's rights or opportunities do not depend on being male or female. Gender difference is a reality. It needs to extend into philanthropy and giving. No matter how well-intentioned, if gender is not considered when determining philanthropic support, it may inadvertently lead to inequality. — “[Strengthening society by investing in women and girls](#),” 2020

Strategies for your foundation to incorporate a feminist grantmaking approach:

- **Stage 1: PREPARING YOUR GRANTING PROCESS**
 - Conduct a gender-based analysis plus (GBA+) review[1] that intertwines gender with other elements of equity, such as accessibility and effectiveness of your granting for youth, racialized and Indigenous people
 - Learn about patriarchal contexts in philanthropy and explore ways your foundation can intentionally shift the power inherent in grantmaking (for example by valuing lived experience, monitoring and evaluation and decolonizing and participatory practices)



Check out our [2020 National Vital Signs](#) reports on Gender Equality in Canada.

- Re-examine foundation policies and practices to evaluate how they strengthen support for marginalized communities versus broaden existing inequities
- Develop awareness of power and privilege inside the organization and commit to ongoing learning and training with humility that will infuse your grantmaking
- Incorporate the Sustainable Development Goals, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action as a framework for grantmaking
- **Stage 2: OBTAINING PROPOSALS**
 - Take an active role to get to know your community, particularly invisible groups to build long term relationships
 - Support groups that have leadership with lived experience (often from the ground up) that are able to shift power for self-determination. For example, Indigenous-led groups and LGBTQ+ led groups.
 - Look for intersectionality that incorporates rights-based and anti-oppression approaches (also known as “nothing about us without us”) that address shifting systemic barriers to gender equality
 - Support a range of initiatives and approaches at the grassroots, advocacy level and at the policy level that are innovating new ways.
 - Support networks, collective action, partnerships, and movements that respond to peoples' immediate individual needs while they try to change policy, law, and institutions for the better



- Support organizations that are testing ideas that may not in full development
 - Develop strategies for supporting non-qualified donees where grant money can get to the most grassroots groups. Do this by creating service agreements or partnerships with other stakeholders and include risk strategies in your policies
 - Make the application process as streamlined as possible and offer alternative applications when needed (for example video submissions, Whatsapp voice recordings)
 - Recognize that some projects may involve political work involved and it could mean supporting issues that might be contentious (for example abortion, sex-worker rights).
 - Have women and particularly BIPOC on grantmaking committees, targeting communications around opportunities for funding for women-led and women supporting organization
 - Put the onus of due diligence on the foundation, not the organization to decrease the administrative burden on the organizations.
- **Stage 3: MAKING THE GRANT**
 - Provide core, responsive, flexible multi-year funding to help create thriving, adaptive, and effective organizations.
 - Use a “grantmaking plus” approach that goes beyond providing financial resources. For example, provide the organization with capacity-building support through leadership training or mentorship programs.
 - Increase the diversity of grant decision-makers amongst the foundation leadership, board and committees
 - Adopt a cooperative model where like-minded organizations and activists are determining where the funds go and reassess the role of decision making at your foundation.
 - **Stage 4: MANAGING THE GRANT**
 - Provide honest and timely communication that minimizes power imbalances and keeps the work moving forward
 - Remain active with the organizations and provide responsive, adaptive and non-monetary support to increase leadership effectiveness and organizational capacity
 - If the project needs to shift directions, take a fail forward approach and welcome adaptations from the original grant when it makes sense
 - **Stage 5: CLOSING AND EVALUATING THE GRANT**



- Simplify and adopt flexible reporting requirements that make them accessible and less burdensome for the organizations. For example, using WhatsApp audio recordings or video submissions.
- Develop evaluation tools that collect data that supports insight, impact, and equity that can be shared with other grantees and the community at large (for example look at open data frameworks)
- Ask for and act on feedback provided by the grantees
- Amplify the leadership in the space by telling their story, celebrate the work they have done and follow them on social media

“Feminist grantmaking shifts power and builds relationships of trust across unequal power positions that can be inherent in funder-grantee relationships. This approach takes into account gender inequality, creative, innovative and flexible ways to provide core financial support”. - Mai Ngo Gender, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Specialist

Case study

Following their 2018 Vital Signs report which focused on gender, Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF) gathered a group of people from diverse backgrounds (many of whom were new to them) in order to learn how they could best respond to the issues raised in the report.

Through several community conversations about systemic barriers to gender equity, participants identified the lack of opportunities to develop genuine relationships as a priority. Community participants helped design ECF’s 2019-2020 Vital Signs Grants program to address this gap. They decided upon a strategy that involved a two stage grant process.

The first phase grants supported people and organizations towards one expected outcome: building genuine relationships and to determine if further collaboration was possible. In phase two, if collaborations were established, ECF would consider grants to support the continued partnerships and action towards the goals developed by the collaborative. Groups were open to use this grant to explore shared values, strengths, opportunities, and activities to advance gender equity through collaboration. Groups could also test ideas through a prototype and the criteria was left to be determined by the people in the collaborations.



At the time this resource was written, 3 organizations had received grants for the first stage and ECF was continuing to learn with the community about this approach and the complexities of collaboration. For ECF, equity is more than an outcome. It is an on-going process that the foundation is committed to that seeks to correct systemic barriers and create a more just and fair society for all.

Leading Feminist Grantmaking Organizations

- [Canadian Women's Foundation](#)
- [The Equality Fund](#)
- [Prospera: International Network of Women's Funds](#)
- [Global Fund for Women](#)
- [Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights](#)
- [The Astraea Lesbian Foundation For Justice](#)
- [The Young Feminist Fund](#)
- [African Women's Development Fund](#)
- [Mama Cash](#)
- [TrueChild](#)